



# News Release

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## **Washington's Tooth Tutor curriculum gets a brush-up**

*Program provides education about oral health's importance*

**OLYMPIA** — Good oral health doesn't happen all by itself. Education is a big part of the equation. Now, a revised, updated curriculum is available to help schools and teachers instruct young people about the importance of dental care and its role in learning. Poor oral health has been linked to poor performance at school and work.

The 2011 edition of the [Tooth Tutor](http://here.doh.wa.gov/materials/tooth-tutor/) (here.doh.wa.gov/materials/tooth-tutor/) program is based on the most recent evidence about oral health topics. A joint project of the Washington State Department of Health and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tooth Tutor aims to bring simple, evidence-based information to the classroom to promote oral health and to enhance learning. The first edition was released in 1996. The new edition is formatted to meet state educational standards.

The 2011 Tooth Tutor program is easy to use. The 10 main sections in this edition include class activities tailored to different grades, with handouts or master copies for each activity.

Corresponding letters to parents and caregivers are included to keep them informed and aware of what students learned in class, and about maintaining good oral health habits at home. Extra background information is also available to support educators.

Pre-kindergarten lessons are designed for non-traditional educators working in preschool settings. Appropriate tooth-brushing standards, and guidelines are included, as well as simple assessments of student learning. Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements and benchmarks met by each lesson are also listed.

In Washington, about 40 percent of preschoolers and 58 percent of third graders had tooth decay in 2010, according to the Smile Survey 2010. These numbers are high compared to other states and to the national Healthy People 2020 Objectives.

Untreated decay can lead to pain, discomfort, and infection. Children and teens with toothaches are more likely to have trouble concentrating at school and score lower than those with no pain. Studies show that students from low-income families have missed 12 times as many days of school because of dental disease as students from families with higher incomes. Dental problems can also lead students to miss valuable school days and to act out at school. According to the Healthy Youth Survey 2010, 8 percent of sixth-graders and 6 percent of eighth, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders in Washington missed school days in the previous year because of dental diseases.

Tooth decay is easily preventable through measures that can be taken at home and school. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, drinking water with fluoride at the recommended levels, applying dental sealants to the back teeth, applying topical fluorides, and eating a healthy diet low in sugar and starch can help prevent decay. Educating children and their families in the classroom on these measures is an important step toward securing good oral health for life.

Tooth Tutor's goal is to help educators feel comfortable teaching students and families how to maintain good oral health — and, as a result, good general health.

Improving the oral health, and consequently general health, of children is essential to help them succeed in life. School districts are important partners because they have a clear interest in promoting student learning and are in direct contact with most children; Tooth Tutor was developed especially for use in schools.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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